Interview with Robert "Bob" Stump, Representative from Arizona. Pharmacist's mate during World War II. By Jan K. Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Washington, DC, 19 April 1999. (1927-2003)

So you were born in Arizona?

Yes, my parents came to Arizona before statehood. I was born in 1927.

And where did you go to high school?

I went to Phoenix Junior High School for the first 2 years, and then all the guys I was running with were seniors. That was in 1943 and, of course, they were either deferred or joined after graduation. And that's how I came to get in the service. All my friends were going so I decided I wanted to go too, and so I kind of boosted my age up a little and joined in 1943.

How old were you?

I was 16 in April and I went in June, so I was barely 16 by 2 months. They never caught up with me. They caught up with a couple of others in boot camp and even after I got to Pearl Harbor, in the receiving station over there, they caught up with another guy. Of course, later on I wished they had maybe caught up with me, but –

Where did you go to boot camp?

San Diego. I went off to San Diego and never saw another one of the guys I joined with. And in those days there were two companies that it seemed like were made up of people from Alabama, Mississippi, and Arizona for some reason. But I went there. And in those days they didn't keep us very long. I went in on June 14, I think, somewhere in the first part of June. And in September I was in Pearl Harbor.

So you didn't start out as a Pharmacists Mate then?

No I did not. Actually I wanted to get into aviation ordnance. I only had 2 years of high school in those days. For some reason or other I didn't make it. They offered to send me to signal school and I didn't want that. And so I just went on out, I was assigned to go to seaman station to wait for the *Idaho*,[BB-42] one of the old battleships that was at the time engaged in the operation up off the in Alaska, Kiska, and Attu. In the process I stayed there so long, at the receiving station, I became good friends with the officer in charge of the Receiving Station, there in Aeia. Well that's where I spent my first few weeks. I actually was taking pre-med even in high school. So in a conversation with him, he asked me if I would like to go down to the Naval Air Station Dispensary and strike for the rating. And that's what I did. I went there as a Seaman Second at the Ford Island Naval Air Station.

What was the procedure for striking for the rating?

It was on the job. You didn't have the formal education like you have now; I don't know how long they kept them in corps school. It was all in San Diego, there at the hospital. I think it was only 6 to 9 weeks.

Is that what it was?

Well I stayed, I was in that dispensary for over a year, about 13 months and then I tried to get to out. The dispensary wasn't that big. We had 2 or 3 doctors and 15 or 20 corpsmen in

those days. You know you get stuck on that island. So it wasn't very long before I started trying to get out of there with a doctor I made friends with. They all kind of took me under their wing or something. But they couldn't get the paperwork done. He went on out and then another doctor, Dr. [ ] Blumberg, came. I finally left there in November of '44, aboard a carrier. But that's where I got my on-the-job training, right there at the dispensary. It's still there. I took a delegation of WWII guys out for the 50th anniversary of V-J Day. I also went there on the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

So you left Ford Island on a carrier?
I left Ford Island on a carrier.

What carrier was it?
The USS *Tulagi* [CVE-72], a CVE. And we went straight to the Philippines, to Luzon.

So that would have been the fall of '44?
That was the fall of '44. D-Day was January 9, so we left staged out of Palau and went on to the Philippines.

What were, did you have any duties on the carrier?
Yes, I was in the operating room. There were two of us that rotated around. We had about 12-14 of us, a chief and a flight surgeon and another doctor and a dentist. I remember these things now because, we had a reunion. I had a guy walk into the store one day, and I heard him say "I was in the Navy with a Bob Stump in WWII and I would like to meet this guy." Well I was sitting right here doing something, and I walked out there and hadn't seen him since we got out of the service in March of '46. He was a lobbyist for Indiana Petroleum working here back and forth, and between the two of us we put on a reunion of our own carrier. We got it together in about 90-days and had great success.

So you had your duties in the operating room. Did you have a lot of business at that point?
From the time we left Pearl Harbor until we got back, which would have been the following July, we did. Talk about appendectomies? We did 13 appendectomies.

Thirteen?
Thirteen. We had four escorts assigned to us, and we did any medical emergencies because they didn't have doctors onboard the DEs, the destroyer escorts. I don't how familiar you are with some of these terms. We had four of them and we would take their major illnesses, and send them over the breeches buoy.

They usually had just a corpsman assigned to DEs.
Yes, probably a first class or a chief. Maybe not even that much.

So you took their business?
We took their business. And then, I don't know, we had 900 I think in ship's crew, and I've forgotten how many in the air wing. But we had close to 1,100 people altogether, on the little carrier.

That's a little jeep carrier?

Yes, there's a picture of it right over there. Our flight deck was 480 feet long. Today, now with the new ones are about 1000 feet or close to it.

That's not a lot of space to land a plane on.

No it isn't. We had the old barrier cables of course. And we'd put one through barrier cables, hell a couple times a month probably. You know they land and that tailhook gets to bouncing up and down and they miss the cable, they go into the barrier. Every time a plane would land they'd lower the barriers and they would push the planes up forward on the flight deck and put the barriers back up and just keep landing. It's just routine, boom, boom, boom, until somebody plowed into the barriers. If you miss the cable there's no way of stopping except wrapping that prop up in those three sets of three-strand barriers that they had.

Didn't do wonders for the prop.

No, no it ruined most of the planes, sometimes. Sometimes it would turn them upside down.

So you got off the coast of Luzon.

We made a couple stops. We went to Eniwetok, took on fuel, and went on to Saipan and then went to Palau and joined up with a bunch of others to form the task force that was with us, that we were a part of, and then onto into the Philippines at that time. D-Day was the 9th as I remember. We started in the Philippines somewhere in the latter part of December.

There was a lot of kamikaze activity.

That's where it really started. They had had a few of them at the battle of Leyte Gulf, but they really came out in mass there. They had a lot of planes on Luzon. In fact I said before the doctor I tried to go with went aboard the Ommaney Bay [CVE-79].

The Ommaney Bay it was a CVE, a little carrier like ours. I forget what the number was. I saw that carrier get hit and go down. Well, we finally torpedoed it but it was disabled by a kamikaze. And I often wondered if he survived. To just sidetrack a little bit. Here a couple of years ago I was over on Point Loma, the Fort Rosecrans cemetery there, and I saw this memorial. I was driving around looking at the cemetery and I saw this little monument there, memorial to USS Ommaney Bay, and went over there and they had every man's name. They lost a hundred and some people. But there were no pharmacist's mates and no doctors. At least the doctor that I was going with didn't survive.

Do you remember his name?

No I don't. I remember the other was Dr. Blumberg of course. Anyway, we went through the invasion there.

You must have had a lot of business at that point.

We lost a lot of planes in the Philippines. We had TBMs and the old FM2s. And the TBMs were underpowered and the Japs shot them down pretty handily. TBMs, TBFs, the same thing that Bush flew. And we never actually ever took a hit on the ship. Of course there were close calls. We shot down several planes, but we didn't take actually any fire.

You were generally below in the sick bay or somewhere at that point at your battle station.

Right. We had sick bay, we had them everyplace. I was on the hangar deck for awhile. In the hangar deck we had kind of a walled in cubicle not even as big as this room. It was kind of a first aid station.

What kind of equipment did you have in there?

We just had emergency supplies. Mostly anti-burn stuff. We took pans, took gauze and layered it and melted petroleum jelly over it. It's what we treated the burns with in those days. That and morphine. Most of the wounds were flash burns.

A few days after the landing when things started calming down, they sent two of us, two little carriers and our escorts, down to support a landing on one of the smaller islands. Anyway, we were steaming along under cloud cover, or broken clouds and all of a sudden a plane went right through the flight deck of the carrier along side of us. There were two planes that neither of us picked up on radar. And they suffered on that. In fact, we picked up one guy out of the water. But we shot the other one down. There were only two planes out there all by themselves. We didn't even know they were there. We kept this kid. He was an aviation ordnance man working on the hangar deck and that flash fire... and he didn't have a shirt on. How the heck he got by without it. In those days, if they caught you without a shirt. He had been working in the belly of a TBM. And he just dove right out of one of the openings on the hangar deck into the water.

Was he burned?

He was burned pretty bad. We picked him up. Actually we didn't fish him out. One of our escorts fished him out and they brought him back to us. And he was from Long Beach; I can't remember his name. But he had an aunt who lived in Los Angeles and he went to see her after he got out of the hospital. But we kept him onboard, my goodness, I don't know how long, probably until the end of January. There were no hospital ships in the immediate area to transfer him.

So you would get a bunch of folks badly burned, flash burns or whatever, and how would treat them once you came down from general quarters and you went back to…

We had a regular ward, I can't remember how many beds we had. We must have had 20 beds or more, plus an officers' ward of 4 beds. And, we'd just keep them onboard; it was the only thing we could do.

So the treatment for burns was just gauze impregnated with petrolatum or petroleum jelly and…

That was all you could do.

That was all you could do and morphine.

Yes, morphine.

Didn't you have sulfanilamide?

We had both sulfanilamide and sulfadiazole.

I'll bet you didn't see penicillin?

Oh, no. We didn't have penicillin in those days. We were still treating venereal diseases with bismuth. None of the people I've talked with to in the Navy saw penicillin.

So you could only treat these people with, as you say gauze and then you would get them off the ship as fast as you could.

Well, yes if we ever had the opportunity. If you went back to Ulithi or one of the places back out of the immediate battle area. And the hospital ships would stay in the area sometimes.

But the Japs hit a couple of hospital ships so they didn't venture out too far in those days.

So you were off Luzon until when?

We left in the latter part of January and went back to Ulithi. That was the base at that time. Nobody knew where it was, and the Japs really weren't too aware of it at the time. It was just a ring of coral atolls out there. Hell, you've seen pictures. There's one showing a row of carrier's the big CVEs, 12-14 of them. They were big carriers; everything would go in there--supply ships and everything. It was about 700 miles back from the Philippines, somewhere back out in there not too far from Yap and Palau. We went back in there, replenished and had 1 or 2 days over on one of the little beaches called Mog Mog. You've probably heard that term before.

Yes. They gave you that 2% beer.

Whatever it was. And then we went back on out. We were especially equipped for anti-submarine patrol also. Then we went on to Iwo Jima to D-Day there. But we did mostly patrol around the island, anti-submarine. Except we dropped a lot of napalm in the caves and that type of thing. But we didn't get in quite as close as we did in the Philippines.

You went back to Pearl after that?

No. We went back Ulithi and then went to Guam and then went to Iwo Jima. We were there also on D-Day off the coast.

What do you remember about that?

We lost a carrier there, another little carrier. We didn't get in that much action there because our primary role then was anti-submarine patrol. We switched off with another little carrier that was equipped the same way we are. I don't know what we had. In those days we had some super advanced homing torpedoes that supposedly were brand new. They were actually kept under Marine guard. We had anti-submarine patrol. Our planes on patrol sank one or two.

You didn't see any of the action at Iwo Jima then?

Not as much as Okinawa or the Philippines, no.

What was a typical day like for you on the carrier?

Well, of course, everybody goes to general quarters before daylight, before dawn. And then after the sun comes up they secure from general quarters depending on where you are, set a certain condition, I've forgotten what they were--1, 2, or 3-- depending on the area you were in and what the probably danger was. And then we'd just go through a routine day. First would hold sick call just like we were in a hospital or whatever for the guys. And after that, pharmacist's mates were pretty much free. We had to rotate around and have duty on the flight deck. Guys were injured up there.

Did you have any specific incidents you remember from that?

You mean guys coming back being shot up? We lost one pilot. If you are going to lose a plane you lose them on takeoff. With some, we'd recover the pilots. A couple of them we didn't. We had a plane flip on the flight deck. He wasn't even doing anything. In fact, I remember the guy's name. He turned over apparently when we were turning to get into the wind. And the plane flipped. He wasn't ever taking off or landing at the time. And apparently he had his hands up on the cowling. We took of these three fingers, what was left of them on one hand and I think those on the other hand. His name was Brown. He was from San Diego or the West Coast there someplace. He was a young ensign, a young kid, hell, 20 years old. In those days all of our pilots were just kids.

So we held sick call in the morning and then you'd rotate to your areas.

Our routine duties, just keeping everything cleaned up and redoing sterile packs, operating packs, had different kind of packs for different kind of operations.

What kind of equipment did you have? You had steam autoclaves. What was a typical pack, what was it, a sterile towel and…?

You had a pack for an appendectomy--a large number of hemostats, and depending on what it was. We didn't do anything that wasn't an emergency or an illness. If we were way out of the battle zone, we might have time to take off a tattoo or something like that, maybe do a tonsillectomy.

Just routine stuff you'd see in any hospital.

Typical of anywhere where you have a thousand guys together; you'd get a little bit of everything.

Did you use plasma?

Oh yes.

Did you have trouble getting supplies?

Not as I recall, I don't know that I would know at my level in those days. But we always had plenty. We had a deck officer cut the femoral vein in his leg and we had a helluva time. We operated on him for 5 or 6 hours trying to get him to stop hemorrhaging and we just poured plasma through him. There are a lot of accidents when you get that many people around under those conditions.

A carrier is just always waiting for accidents to happen. With all those planes landing and taking off. As they say they controlled crashes is what they call those landings. That's what the pilots call them. And they certainly look like that.

They do. We lost a lot of planes, we'd just shove them over the side if they get too tangled up in the barriers. You can't wait around.

You've got to get the deck clear.

Yes, you don't have that much room. I've forgotten how many planes we carried, 20 some is all. Between the TBMs and the FM2s and then some F-4s later on.

So you were involved Okinawa too you say?

I was involved in Okinawa, yes.

What do your remember about that?

Well, that was by far the worst. D-Day was April 1, which happened to be Easter Sunday. And we were there 4 or 5 days advance. There was no problem with the invasion in Okinawa. Actually there wasn't at Luzon either, as far as getting men on the beach with a lot of fire, like Iwo Jima, of course. But we lost more ships and more people, I believe I'm correct, at Okinawa than we did in all the rest of the battles put together, maybe. The Army took a helluva loss. It wasn't on the beach; it was in the caves.

A lot of the ships, the picket ships were destroyers that were out to try to intercept, or at least get the word out that the planes were coming.

They called it the picket line.

And they took a lot of loses.

Some of those destroyers and DEs got hit three and four times. But they usually stayed out 20 miles or more, between Japan, and us.

So you handled the casualties from those events?

No we did not, no. They had a hospital ship there at Kamarata Retto. At Kamarata Retto was a little island right off Okinawa. It was a natural harbor. They would let only one big ship at a time go in there. There were ammunition ships and tankers there, everything. We went in on the 6th of April to get bombs. And while we were there, in the middle of the afternoon, the Japs came out. It happened to be the day they shot down the most planes of any day during the war. I think some 600 planes were shot down in the area on that particular day. We didn't suffer any casualties. We launched two planes sitting there under condition red and our own ships shot them down. We got both pilots back. They shouldn't have been launched in the first place. I don't know what ever happened to the officer that gave that order because under this condition you shoot at anything that's flying.

There was an LST about 100 yards behind us. And one plane was coming right in on the back. We had one 5- inch on the fantail--open mount--and we had our 40mm, which was the best gun. But I was on the flight deck at this time, and this plane was coming right straight for us. We hadn't hit him or anything, certainly with anything enough to do any damage. And at the last moment, he just banked up and went into that LST which happened to be loaded with gasoline. And it just blew it out of the water. We shot down two others. We were not even steaming; we were stopped taking on bombs. We shot down two others there. So that was it. There were planes all over. I don't know how many planes they shot down in that immediate area. We lost two ammunition ships that night--the *Logan Victory* and another one the Japs hit. But we never took a single hit

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Did you take any of the casualties from the LST or…?

No, no, they had a hospital ship there too. We got the hell out of there as quick as we could. Because we had bombs all over the hangar deck and everyplace just lying there.

Were you up on the deck and did you see all this happen?

I was up on deck when this happened. Sometimes we'd rotate around of our flight crew. A little side story. I was at one of these cut-rate bookshops with my daughter and a friend one day and started looking around. In fact I've got most of the Naval WWII books that Naval Institute puts out. I'm an avid history fan of WWII. I buy them all the time. And I picked up this oversized book and was just kind of leafing through it there, and I looked at this and the caption underneath was "taken from the flight deck of the USS *Tulagi*." I was standing probably 150 feet from where the guy took the picture. He took the picture with the LST in the background. You could see the planes on the end of our flight deck.

I've seen that photograph. You can see the LST with smoke just pouring out of it. The plane then wasn't that far away from you then?

No, he was 100, 200 yards at the most. Right directly aft of us flying right into that 5-inch gun. There were some small hills there, weren't as big as this building. And the planes were all over, and there was a big gap there. In one instance this plane was coming across, coming across, coming across, I guess to come around and we just trained the fire right through that gap. He flew right into it.

So Okinawa that was the last one you were in?

That was the last one period. There wasn't anything after Okinawa. We finally left sometime in June and headed back to Guam. And eventually we picked up a lot of troops and took some back at that time. Back to Pearl. We were only there and took on supplies--took some people and left some people. I went over to get some medical supplies and see some of the old guys that I was stationed there with. They were shocked to see me walk in there because somebody started a rumor that I'd been killed someplace. Then here I walked in the door.

You were an old salt by then.

Hell, I was only 18 when I got out of the service. I got out on March the 8th '46. I went through all three of those engagements before I was 18.

You hadn't even been through high school yet.

I went back to high school after I got out of the service.

Where did you go after you left Pearl?

When we got back, I was transferred to Alameda Naval Air Station. I spent less than 3 months there and went right back out on another carrier.

What did you go out on the second?

The *Lunga Point*. In fact she was with us in our group several times, at Luzon in fact.

The war was over by then.

The war was over in August. I got back to the states just about the time they dropped the first bomb. We came back, I guess, in the middle of July and they dropped the bomb in August.
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August the 6th, the day I was born.

Oh is that right? Well the war was over August 14th, wasn't that the final...?

August 14th was when they accepted terms. Then, of course, September 2nd they had the surrender ceremony. Do you remember when you heard about the bomb being dropped?

I was back in Arizona, I believe. When we first hit the states, the very next day I was one of the first ones to take leave. I hadn't been home in over 2 years. I spent some time there and then went back out to Guam and brought a thousand Marines back. They took all the planes off and had cots on the hanger deck. We brought these Marines back to San Diego.

That operation was called magic carpet.

That's right. I'd forgotten that term. After we dropped off the Marines, we took the *Lunga Point* up to Tacoma and decommissioned it. And then shortly thereafter I came from there back down to Long Beach and was discharged at San Pedro on March the 8th, 1946.

Then you went home to Arizona?

Actually, I say Phoenix but it's Tolleson about 15 miles west of Phoenix. I was born and raised in there, the middle of the field out there. But then that summer I took some classes back at Phoenix Union, and then that fall I went to Tolleson because it was closer. They gave me so much credit for being in the service and all and so I took civics, and typing, and chemistry. I played sports and went on to ASU after the year of high school.

Have you been back to any of reunions besides the one you organized about 10 years ago?

That's the only one I've ever been too and the only one that the ship's ever had. I've had a couple of inquiries and Dave Davis has also. He still lives in Indianapolis. I talk to him occasionally and send him clippings and what not.

Do you keep of with any of these folks now?

I keep up only with Dave. It's hell trying to find these guys. But no, he's the only one that I've kept up with.

Well, you obviously are still involved with the military being on the Veterans Affairs Committee. You're chairman aren't you?

Yes. I chair the Veterans Affairs Committee. We're the second largest employer in the federal government. Our budget is 44 billion dollars. We have 173 hospitals, over 500 outpatient clinics, 116 national cemeteries, and I don't know how rehabilitation and training centers. And I'm vice chairman of Armed Services, which is the number two spot. But there is a lot more work there then even chairing the VA committee, which is one of the smaller committees. We have 30 members on the VA Committee.

Well. you certainly have credibility; you were there. It's good to have someone who has that experience so you can understand what kinds of things veterans need, being a veteran yourself. What could be more appropriate?

I'll tell you, there are not many here. We have about 26 million veterans in this country. We are losing 31,000 WWII veterans a month. That's how fast they're dying off. That's how I've gotten involved in this WWII memorial. I'd like to see it built before we're all dead. I'll be 72.

Well, you're one of the younger WWII veterans. Most of them are up there in years. Most of the people I've interviewed are in their late seventies and eighties. And there was at least one that was ninety when I interviewed him.

If you figure that I was barely sixteen and went in in '43. We have less than 12 vets from WWII in the House today and I think only 3 of us had combat. I don't know if there's anybody from Korea. There are a lot of Vietnam guys and some Gulf War vets now, but they are disappearing.